

Nutrition 101

Back to School

Healthy School Lunches



School lunches get big makeover in North Jersey

In the biggest change to school lunch menus in 15 years, the U.S. Department of Agriculture is imposing a new set of nutrition standards.

The most drastic changes include requiring each student to have a piece of fruit or serving of vegetables on his/her tray, at least half of the grains served have to be whole grains, and milk has to be fat-free or low-fat. The reforms that take effect this month are part of the 2010 Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act championed by first lady Michelle Obama and her campaign to reduce childhood obesity. Some 32 million children nationwide participate in school lunch programs every day.

Food Safety!

Temperature.

Keep Hot Foods Hot, Cold Foods, Cold!

Insulated lunch boxes help maintain food at a safe temperature until lunchtime. Perishable lunch foods, such as cold cut sandwiches and yogurt, can be left out at room temperature for only 2 hours before they may become unsafe to eat. With an insulated lunch box and a chilled freezer pack, perishable food can stay cold and safe!

Clean Hands.

Always have clean hands when preparing and eating lunches. Wash hands for 20 seconds with warm water and soap or use hand-sanitizing gels.

Non-perishable Food.

Some food is safe without a cold source like whole fruits & vegetables, hard cheese, chips, breads, peanut butter and jelly.

Bento Boxes

Have you heard of them? Bento boxes are a Japanese packed lunch that usually includes rice or pasta, some protein, and fruits and vegetables. The bento lunch is becoming increasingly popular in the U.S. The boxes are reusable containers with different sections to keep food separate, fresh and visually pleasing. An advantage to the hand-packed bento is the ability for parents to monitor proper portion sizes. They make sense!



Why keep food cold?

Harmful bacteria multiply rapidly in the "Danger Zone"- the temperatures between 40 and 140 °F. So, perishable food transported without a cold source won't stay safe long.

Healthy Lunch Options

Whether it's brown bagged or on-the-go, there's always healthy lunch options.

Here are some great tips and choices to go to.

For the Kids

Try these menu items to jazz up bag lunches!

Pasta Lover's Lunch Salad. Pack a cold pasta salad and a plastic fork, and your pasta lover will love you, too! Make the salad with lean meat or low-fat cheese (so it has some protein), lots of vegetables to boost fiber and nutrition, and whole wheat or whole-grain pasta. Toss everything together with a light bottled vinaigrette made with extra virgin olive oil or canola oil.

Mediterranean Pita Pocket. Fill a pita pocket with falafel balls and some homemade or store-bought hummus. Some falafel balls come cooked and ready to add.

Fruit and Cheese Plate. Fill a divided plastic container with assorted cubes or slices of reduced fat cheese, easy-to-eat fruit such as apple and pear slices, grapes, berries or melon and whole-wheat crackers.

Peanut Butter Fun Pack. Make a peanut butter fun pack by spooning two tablespoons of natural-style peanut butter in a reusable plastic container, along with whole wheat crackers or whole wheat pita pocket wedges and raw vegetables such as celery, zucchini, or jicama sticks.

Everything Is Better on a Mini Bagel. Whole-wheat bagels are a wonderful foundation for hardy sandwiches that stand up to being in a backpack or locker all morning. Start with one regular or a few mini bagels. Add tuna or lean, roasted, and sliced turkey or roast beef. Top it off with reduced-fat cheese and fresh tomato, onion, and Romaine lettuce or sprouts. Two mini bagels can supply 6 grams of fiber to the meal.

Soy Much for Sandwiches. For a change of pace, make soy the center of your child's lunch. There are more and more great-tasting soy-based products available. For example, specialty grocery stores carry meatless corn dogs. To prepare one for a bag lunch, heat it up in the microwave in the morning. Remove the wooden stick, crisp it up briefly in the toaster oven, and wrap it in foil. Meatless versions of chicken nuggets are also available and can be prepared just like the corn dogs. The trick is finding a brand your child enjoys that isn't too high in sodium.



Sandwich Tips

If you go to a sandwich shop or deli, follow these four rules:

1. **Go for lean meat.** Fill your sandwich with lean meat or a vegetarian option. The leanest meat fillers are turkey or chicken breast, roast beef, and lean ham. A 2-ounce serving of each of these at the Subway chain will cost you around 60-70 calories and 2-5 grams of fat.
2. **Spread the bread wisely.** Spread the bread with mustard, fat-free dressing, or a small amount of olive oil. If you have to have mayo, take an individual packet of mayo with you rather than having them apply it. That way you can spread exactly the amount you want, on just one side of your sandwich. Some establishments offer "light" mayonnaise. If you keep it to 1 1/2 teaspoons, it will add 25 calories and 2 1/2 grams of fat.
3. **Pile on the veggies.** When it comes to tomato, lettuce, onions, sprouts, etc., the more the merrier. These fillers add fiber and nutrients for almost no calories.
4. **Whole-grain bread is best.** If the shop has a whole-wheat or whole-grain roll

